

# Free Afghanistan

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## War of Words: Abdul Haq visits London *by Julian Gearing*



## Subversion in Pakistan *by Olivier Roy*

## "Dust of the Saints" A profile of Herat

# FOREWORD



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

HON. COLIN MOYNIHAN, Member of Parliament for Lewisham East

1986 has witnessed a much overdue resurgence of parliamentary interest in Afghan affairs. On February 18th Prime Minister's Question Time was dominated by an exchange of interventions over whether the then President Karmal should meet the Prime Minister. Foreign Office Question Time saw further exchanges in May and June. However, perhaps of greatest significance has been the resurrection of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Afghanistan. Keenly contested elections reflected the considerable interest that exists amongst widely different shades of party opinion.

Chairman	:	Colin Moynihan, MP
Vice Chairman	:	Gordon Wilson, MP
Treasurer	:	James Lamond, MP
Secretary	:	Viscount Cranborne, MP

The initial series of events are scheduled to include meetings with the Afghanistan Charge D'Affaires, Jonathan Steele, Sandy Gall, Gordon Adams and the Foreign Office Ministers responsible for Afghanistan.

Adjournment debates have also focussed attention on Afghanistan. On the eve of the Christmas recess Tim Eggar MP the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the FCO confirmed the Government's position to:

"take every opportunity to encourage the resistance to draw attention to its gallant struggles and to give it what support we can in its efforts".

By March 13th those keen to see greater assistance to the Mujahideen's efforts inside Afghanistan were heartened to hear the Minister's recognition that the Government "are only too well aware of the appalling conditions faced by many people still inside Afghanistan". By May 1st consistent pressure on the Government reaped its reward when Tim Raison MP Minister for Overseas Development recognised that the Government should "do all that we can to help maintain the best possible existence (for the Afghans) *in their own country*, to prevent them fleeing to add to the statistics of helpless refugees in neighbouring states." We now look to see this commitment put into practice.

Visits to Westminster have included a number of historic meetings. Abdul Haq's visit will long be remembered as a significant opportunity for the Government to reiterate its support for the Mujahideen whilst Mrs. Gailani's address to the UN Westminster Branch and the Foreign Affairs Committee were all important occasions.

For too long we have followed behind the strong focus on Afghanistan showed in Western European and Scandinavian parliaments. A strong British parliamentary focus is essential if the twin pillars of the Mujahideen's objectives — a guerrilla war inside Afghanistan and a high visibility political campaign in international fora are to be maintained. Indeed, there is a moral duty on all politicians to raise the level of international attention on Afghanistan at a time when public opinion has in recent years followed aid flows to Sub-Saharan Africa.

The All Party Group can assist this process and the 87 members of all parties who have demonstrated their commitment to the resurgence of the Group will I hope raise the level of parliamentary interest and debate.

Colin Moynihan

# News Update .....

## EXIT KARMAL — ENTER NAJIB

The appointment of Dr. Najib as the new head of the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul on the eve of what was seen as an important round of UN-sponsored talks in Geneva in May prompted considerable confusion about the prospects for peace and the withdrawal of the 120,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Amid a barrage of conflicting signals and a vigorous public relations campaign from both Moscow and Kabul, speculation about a real change of heart by the Soviets abounded.

However, much as the Soviets may want to rid themselves of their very messy involvement in Afghanistan, for them the prospect of a return to all out civil war in the country is a nightmare. On this we are all on common ground: the Soviets seek stability in Afghanistan.

Babrak Karmal's failure to eliminate the Resistance or broaden the social base of the regime or to put an end to the destructive in-fighting between the Khalq and Parcham factions of the Afghan communist party must have added to the frustrations of Mr Gorbachev, clearly a man who likes efficiency.

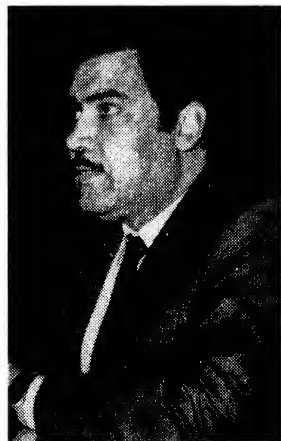
In 39 year old Najib, who is almost 20 years younger than Karmal, they have chosen a man who is utterly loyal

to Moscow, KGB trained and with a reputation for being ruthless and ambitious. He has been praised by the Prime Minister Sultan Ali Keshtmand as a "strong and penetrating weapon of the Revolution". During his time as Director of the Khad (the State secret police) his campaign to infiltrate and subvert the Pushtoon tribes along the border of Pakistan was seen as almost the only success of the regime.

In his first months of office, Najib has been touring the country making bold statements about 'national reconciliation' claiming that there is no issue which cannot be settled with those who till now have opposed the regime but often in the same breath he calls for death to the enemy.

The problems which defeated Babrak Karmal have not disappeared with his demise. For the moment, Najib can use fear to keep discipline between the factions in the communist ranks because of his detailed knowledge of the Khad files but he is forever marked by the anti-Khalq activities of his youth. He is an unpopular man and has found opposition from an unexpected quarter in the urban student population on which the Soviets have placed a deal of hope for the future.

Najib had success in paying off the



Dr Najib

Pushtoon tribes but the English found to their cost in the Afghan wars that you can never buy a Pushtoon tribesman, only hire him for a bit.

Najib's hopes of control are tenuous unless he can find a way to strengthen the Afghan army which has, despite efforts from all sides, proved hopelessly inefficient. It is difficult to see how he can do this, threats, financial inducements, increased subscription have all failed. Indeed, the Soviets have found even their own conscript army not up to the task of eliminating the Resistance and rely more and more on their Elite and Spetznaz troops.

Soviet hopes for stability after a withdrawal of their troops have rested to some extent on the Pakistanis cutting all support to the Resistance as part of a package deal. They must surely have learnt by now that they should not underestimate the Resistance. They cannot, ostrich-like, ignore the strength of the opposition against the regime they have imposed nor the strength of international support for rights of the Afghan people.

If the Soviets seek genuine stability in Afghanistan, they must recognise the right of the Resistance to be a party to the talks in Geneva and the right of the Afghan people to a government of their own choosing.

**Dr. Najib:** born in 1947 in Kabul. He is Pushtoon of the Ahmadzai Gilzai tribe of Paktia. He comes from a comfortable bourgeois family, his father was in the Royal civil administration, a representative of a bank. He went to school in Kabul to the English language Habibia College and Najib joined the PDPA before entering the Medical Faculty at Kabul University. During his time as a student, he wrote many articles for the 'Parcham' magazine and was twice jailed for political activities. His reputation for being slow academically may result from this devotion to political activities as much as anything else, in any event, he did not obtain his degree until 1975. He was on military service in 1976.

Najib became a member of the Central Committee in 1977 and the Revolutionary Council in 1978, but was 'exiled' by Taraki during Khalq-Parcham in-fighting to become Ambassador in Tehran, but only briefly before being dismissed and expelled from the PDPA, accused of plotting against the Khalq.

Under Babrak, after the Soviet invasion, he was appointed once again to the Central Committee and Revolutionary Council and was head of KHAD, the State Secret Police from 1980-85. In June 1981, he joined the Politburo and was head of the Tribal department of the Ministry of Tribes and Nationalities, and with Suleiman Laiq administered the programme of subversion and intelligence amongst the Pushtoon tribal belt. Najib's title General is honorific as a result of his work for KHAD.

On 21 November 1985, Najib became the Secretary of the Central Committee.

Najib's wife Fatana belongs to the Kabul aristocracy related to the Royal family, the Mohammadzais.

# ZHAWAR — CONVENTIONAL vs. GUERRILLA WARFARE

by Julian Gearing

Both sides were claiming victory in a recent conflict in Paktia. April saw a concerted drive by Afghan government and Soviet forces to destroy resistance bases. One major focus of attention was the resistance stronghold of Zhawar, an elaborate base dug into the sides of a canyon, which had assumed a symbolic level of importance far above its actual practical use in what is essentially a guerrilla war, where fixed bases are a prime target of attack.

The Mujahideen believe that the government forces wanted to take and hold Zhawar in order to block the resistance supply route from Pakistan and establish their own bases in the area, offering them a better opportunity to retake the Afghan government post at Lalzhe, which the resistance has held for the last three years.

At the beginning of the year military activity in Paktia increased and additional troops were brought in. Information obtained from prisoners caught by the Mujahideen during March, when their resistance base at Chamkani was attacked, gave them some details of the planned attack on Zhawar. In response Commander Jalaludin Haqani of Hisbi-Islami appealed for help from the other resistance parties, based in Peshawar. With the Alliance a year old and more communication between the parties, cooperation was agreed on to combat the attack.

In what the Mujahideen claim were 1,000 bombing runs, the Soviet forces began a day and a half of daylight bombing on April 5. 600 helicopter troops were then dropped the following day on the hills tops, now empty of Mujahideen, who had been forced to vacate their machine-gun posts and trenches. These troops were backed by infantry in the south and east and tanks from the north, in what was primarily an attack carried out by Afghan government forces.

The 600 helicopter Afghan com-

mandos proved no match, however, for the Mujahideen, some of whom had come from as far away as Peshawar following news of the attack. During the night the continual use of flares and tracers revealed their positions and, apart from taking some prisoners, the Mujahideen claim to have wiped out the whole force.



Commander Jalaludin Haqani — united parties in face of Soviet attack

The day following the defeat of the commandos, fighting erupted once more, this time against Government troops to the north and west of Zhawar. Air strikes began again. Bombers came in low, hitting anything that moved. The centre of Zhawar was destroyed and one of the caves being used as a shelter suffered a direct hit, in which 28 of its occupants died.

"Perhaps they learned a good lesson not to try to keep such a big base and become immobile," said Sayed Majrooh of the Afghan Information Centre in Peshawar.

"After holding it for seven years, the Mujahideen began thinking Zhawar was impregnable," said Mohammad

Es'Haq, a political officer of the Jamiat-i-Islami Party. "But no matter how strong we are, we are still guerrillas, and we should not try to hold territory or fixed bases like this," he said. "Now, I think, we will remain more mobile."

The Mujahideen claim that the Soviet forces used napalm. Commander Haqani says he smelt petrol as two bombs exploded behind him, burning the side of his face, shoulders and body. He ordered that weapons and munitions not immediately required should be taken over the border to safety in Pakistan.

During the lull after the second bombing, the Soviet forces airlifted many of their dead out of the area.

Reports of the succeeding phase, which lasted a further 18 days, are unclear. Much of the fighting was at night, with continued bombing and the use of BM-21 missiles making it difficult for people to move.

Twenty-one days after the fighting began, the Afghan government and Soviet forces withdrew. The reasons are unclear. Their aim may have been to inflict a crushing psychological blow on the Mujahideen and pull out, having believed intelligence reports that the Mujahideen were isolated in one area. In reality, they were in three areas and were able to surround the attackers.

According to some reports, the Government forces in the garrison of Khost are being reinforced and a further offensive may be planned. But prisoners say that the morale of the Soviet and Afghan government troops is low. This contrasts with what is claimed to be the high morale of the Mujahideen following what they feel was a victory. Commander Haqani claims that his men killed 1,010 enemy soldiers, including 510 Afghan commandos and 18 Soviet personnel, and that they took 230 prisoners, including helicopter pilots. They also claim to have shot down four helicopters and 10 other aircraft. Mujahideen casualties, they say, were 130 killed and 280 wounded, numbers which contrast with the Kabul Regime's figures of 2000 killed and 4000 wounded.

## STING IN THE TAIL

by Julian Gearing

In a much publicised move, the United States has stated it is sending Stinger shoulder-missiles to the 'freedom fighters' in Afghanistan and Angola. 200 are said to have been allotted for Afghanistan. As with previous promises of aid, the major commanders are sceptical as to whether they will receive any of these weapons. Both Commander Allahuddin from Herat and Abdul Haq from Kabul, on recent visits to Britain, indicated they would 'wait and see'.

Resistance commanders frequently

stress that there is a real need for an effective anti-aircraft capability. At present their main anti-aircraft weapons are heavy machine-guns, DSchK and Zigouriak, which have a limited capability. Although they have received a limited number of heat-seeking Soviet SAM-7 missiles, these have proved virtually useless, due to inadequate training, malfunction, and the extensive use of decoy flares by aircraft. The Stinger missile, however, has a greater range, is more accurate, and is easier to use, though it still takes two weeks to train US military personnel in its use. Described by Jane's as a "fire-and-forget weapon employing a passive infra-red seeker and a navigation system... with a hit-

to-kill warhead", it is considered to be the ideal defence against the notorious MI-24 helicopter gunships.

All this publicity, however, may have a negative spin-off. It gives the Soviet Union even more reason for its forces to remain in Afghanistan as the supply of these weapons indicates further, and a higher level of, 'foreign interference in the affairs of Afghanistan'. Democratic sources in the US have expressed concern that not only might this modern American military hardware fall into hostile hands, but that its introduction marks a significant upgrading of the 'Reagan doctrine' of confronting Marxist regimes. This they feel could lead to more dangerous levels of conflict in the Third World.

# War of Words: Abdul Haq visits London

by Julian Gearing

In the most public display of support for the Afghan Resistance that the British Government has extended, Mrs Thatcher met Mujahideen commander Abdul Haq on March 11, 1986. This meeting followed talks with other MPs including Dr David Owen and Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe. This was the first time the Prime Minister has met an active field commander, previous meetings being with political representatives of the Mujahideen.

As a member of the Hisb-i-Islami (Younus Khales) party he ranks among the top handful of resistance commanders in Afghanistan, with his groups' main area of activity in and around the capital city of Kabul. Soviet aircraft, artillery, and missiles have destroyed most of the villages around Kabul, driving the civilians away and creating a 'free-fire zone'. Despite being poorly armed his Mujahideen have had some measure of success in attacking Soviet, and Afghan government, targets, on some occasions using inaccurate ground-to-ground missiles. However, three defensive rings around the city and increased use of Soviet Elite forces have severely hampered the Mujahideen's operations.

Abdul Haq, who speaks English, has been to Britain before on a private visit, and last year went to the USA where he was publicly welcomed by President Reagan. Naturally such meetings cause controversy. When the Contras and the Mujahideen are mentioned in the same breath it does little to help the political image of the Afghan Resistance. With the restrictions on entry into Afghanistan, much of the world is in the dark about what is really happening in Afghanistan, and world opinion is not fully behind the Resistance.

Controversy followed the publication on March 5 in *The Guardian* of an article on the proposed meeting, entitled: Thatcher to meet Afghan Guerrilla, by Jonathan Steele:

*The Prime Minister is to see an Afghan rebel leader whose group takes credit for planting a bomb at Kabul airport which killed a dozen civilians.*

And later in the article:

*Mr Haq said the purpose of the airport bombing was "to warn people not to send their children to the Soviet Union." He also defended the firing of long-range rockets at Kabul which have also hit civilians. "I have to to free my country. My advice to people is not to stay close to the government. If you do, it's your fault. We use poor rockets; we cannot control them. They sometimes miss. I don't care about people who live close to the Soviet Embassy, I feel sorry*

*for them, but what can I do?" he said. "If I kill 50 civilians and the Russians kill millions, why don't people talk about that?"*

This came as the fourth in a series of articles Mr Steele had written, following 18 days as guest of the Afghan government. On his way back to Britain he visited Pakistan but made no attempt to visit Peshawar and talk to resistance representatives to gain some impression of their side of the story. Only in London did he take up our offer of talking to a resistance commander, Abdul Haq.



Commander Abdul Haq in Kabul Province.  
Photo: J. Gunston

In response to Jonathan Steele's articles, *The Guardian* published my letter on March 8 under the title 'Afghanistan back to front':

*Sir, — Jonathan Steele's article, "Thatcher to meet Afghan guerrilla" (March 5) and his pieces last month fail to address the real problem in Afghanistan.*

*As a journalist, having covered the war from the "other side" — which Mr Steele calls that of 'the counter-revolutionaries' — it is obvious the people he should be asking about the killing of civilians are the Soviet occupation forces. The long lines of refugees escaping over the mountains to Pakistan testify to the fact that Soviet forces are making concerted efforts to kill and terrorise civilians.*

*In August 1984 on the Chamar Pass close to the Panjshir Valley, I witnessed an unprovoked Soviet air attack on a nomads' encampment in which 40 men, women, and children were killed and 70 injured. The survivors were left to struggle for more than 10 days over high passes to reach safety in Pakistan.*

*We are sending Mr Steele a copy of a report by Felix Ermacora for the United Nations commission of inquiry*

*into human rights' abuses in Afghanistan. In this, he will find it is the Soviet forces who are accused of bombing villages, massacring civilians, poisoning cattle and water supplies, and summarily executing captured Afghan guerrillas. They use sophisticated weapons including fighter aircraft, helicopter gunships, and tanks.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Julian Gearing.*

*Information Office*

*Afghanistan Support Committee  
London WC2*

But the matter did not end there. The following day the Afghan government protested to the British charge d'affaires in Kabul over the meeting, describing Abdul Haq as a "well-known professional terrorist and felon".

Prior to the meeting a few articles indicating a different view were published in the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Express*, and the following excerpt from an article in *The Times* by Nicholas Ashford (10.3.86):

*It is not often that guerrilla commanders are invited to Downing Street for a chat with the Prime Minister. Mrs Thatcher has an aversion to the use of violence for political aims which is why her ministers keep their distance from the African National Congress and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.*

*But Abdul Haq is different. He is an Afghan resistance fighter in the tradition of the French maquis who is struggling to liberate his country from an invasion force of almost 120,000 Soviet troops. Although the men under Haq's command may sometimes use brutal tactics — such as assassinations, sabotage or bombs in airports — they are fighting a ruthless enemy who has killed tens, possibly hundreds of thousands of Afghans with bombs, bullets, rockets, and missiles.*

And later in the article:

*He conceded that the Russians had succeeded in making the Mujahideen's task more difficult. "But we are still hitting them", he said. "In the long run they cannot win because very few people support them." He predicted that the government of President Babrak Karmal, which "invited" the Russians into Afghanistan in 1979, would collapse if they now tried to leave.*

On the day of the meeting, *The Guardian* published two letters on the subject under the title, 'U-turning over terrorism', in which an organisation funded by the Afghan government, 'Friends of Afghanistan', put forward its view:

Sir, — Mrs Thatcher's decision (*Guardian*, March 5) to invite — at the taxpayer's expense — Abdul Haq, a self-confessed Afghan terrorist who was responsible for killing twenty-eight people, most of them school children, is devoid of both morality and political prudence.

It not only runs counter to Mrs Thatcher's self-professed dictum not to meet any terrorist, but also served to provide respectability for terrorists. And it contrasts with the refusal of a visa to Dr Anahita Ratebzad, head of the Afghan Women's Association, to visit this country. She was invited by fourteen MPs, several trade unions, and social organisations to present her side of the story. (see 'Women in the Jihad' by Fatima Gailani — issue No. 3 'Free Afghanistan', Ed).

Whatever view Mrs Thatcher may hold, she is totally wrong in keeping from the British public, views which she does not personally approve of.

Afghan terrorists may wander

around the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan and be welcomed by some Western leaders for years to come. But what matters is that Afghan reforms are succeeding, and the country's economy improving.

This indicates that the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan is here to stay, and the quicker we learn to live with it the better it will be for world peace and international relations.

Yours faithfully,

Mohammed Arif.

Friends of Afghanistan Society,  
London SW18.

This came as another example of the Soviet and Afghan government propaganda offensive which is being stepped up to counter, what they claim is, 'heavy imperialist propaganda'. Yet the 'counter-revolutionary' propaganda of which they complain is nowhere near as effective as it could be and Abdul Haq is aware of this. He realises that the media and politics are

important factors if the Resistance are to achieve their aims.

One positive result of his visit was that the subject of Afghanistan was discussed by the media and also in Parliament. Controversy brings the subject out into the open and in-depth discussion may indicate something of the true state of affairs.

The final shots in the war of words over Abdul Haq's visit took place on March 13 at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Two envoys, not from the Afghan Embassy as one might expect, but from the Soviet Embassy, arrived to denounce the British Government's reception of Abdul Haq. They complained that this constituted interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Mr Terence Wood of the South Asia Department replied that it ill behoved representatives of the Soviet Union to protest about interference when they had a 120,000 strong occupying force in the country.

## Working for Afghanaid in Peshawar

by David Inglesfield

As students return to their labours after the Easter vacation each year, their minds naturally turn to the next holiday, ten weeks away. Thus it was that last April I rang the Afghanistan Support Committee office offering my services as a general secretary-cum-sidekick in London over the Summer. To my surprise and delight I found myself accepting instead an offer to do a research project in Peshawar. Seven essays later I stepped off a small and antiquated plane onto a building site grandly named 'Peshawar International Airport' and into a level of heat which dominated all else for the two months of my stay.

My brief was threefold: to be a general assistant to Bruce Wannell, Afghanaid Field Director in Peshawar; to familiarise myself more fully with the whole situation, so that I could speak with some knowledge and authority upon my return to Newcastle; and to begin a social and economic survey of four provinces of Afghanistan.

The latter took up the most of my time, although even by September I was aware that much was left undone. Every contact I made, every piece of information I obtained seemed only to produce more questions, offer more unexplored avenues of knowledge. The object of the exercise was to build up a bank of information which might be useful in planning aid projects. Criteria such as population distribution and refugee migration, the state of agriculture, trading patterns, Mujahideen groups and leaders, medical and education facilities were all investigated. One of the things which became immediately apparent, however, was that coverage

of my four provinces, Wardak, Kunar, Nangarhar and Badakshan — would be anything but uniform. For some areas, such as Kunar and Chah Wardak, I was able to speak directly to well-informed contacts such as Aminullah Wardak, brother of resistance leader Amin, and Professor Sayed Majrooh, a native of Kunar. However, for other areas detailed first-hand knowledge was difficult to come by. Clearly, most refugees can tell a great deal about their village and its immediate environs but will have little concept of the province as a whole. Such information is still very valuable, especially as in a primitive agrarian society life may be assumed to be similar over wide areas.

The basic research technique was to interview a subject using a standard set of questions covering the areas in which I was interested, and to retain this interview format in the final report, in recognition of the necessary subjective character of much of the information. I also made extensive use of sketch maps, collating data in a readily accessible form, and using transparent overlay sheets to highlight different sets of data-population distribution, relief and so on.

One of the interesting things about working in Peshawar was that the unexpected happens all the time which throws awry a carefully timetabled day. Thus, when I was visiting Prof. Raul Amin one afternoon his assistant told me that he had an old uncle, brother of the last chief of a Nangarhar tribe, who would be visiting Peshawar the following day. This was a stroke of luck for the old man did not often come over to Pakistan, and I was able to have a fascinating two-hour discussion about

his district which was of great benefit to the project.

Towards the end of my stay, I obtained a permit to visit one of the refugee camps in the mountains of the district, close to the border. The Refugee Commissioner accommodated me in his own home, and provided an interpreter, enabling me to compile case studies for six refugees from Kunar province which illuminated particular problems of their villages. I worked in a dark hut surrounded by a crowd of curious refugees all enthusiastic to tell their tale; despite their awful plight they retained great reserves of confidence and courage.

The clear and unsurprising pattern of evidence which emerged from my studies was one of widespread bombing of farmland and villages, leading to population migration, food shortages and serious disruption of traditional economies and trading patterns. Medical facilities were sparse everywhere, diseases and war injuries frequently going untreated. The only more hopeful situation was in Wardak province where the hinterland areas had seen less devastation and an effective Mujahideen organisation had facilitated some degree of First Aid arrangements (for example, motorcycles for doctors to reach incidents quickly).

I didn't do more than scratch the surface of a huge topic, but it was a fascinating two months. My maps and interviews are now filed in the Afghanaid library in Peshawar, and I am kept busy back in Newcastle sharing my experiences with local groups in the University and City.

# No Protection — The Fate of Prisoners in the Afghan War

by Julian Gearing



Execution — summary justice for three Afghans who had been working for the Soviet forces and were captured by the Mujahideen. Nr. Jalalabad. Photo: P. Jouvénal

After a gap of three years and with little publicity, a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva visited Kabul in April of this year to discuss access to prisoners being held by the Afghan Government. This came at a time when the last of 11 Soviet prisoners finished their detention in Switzerland, following their capture by the Mujahideen and transfer to the custody of the Red Cross.

Agreement appears to have been reached which will allow Red Cross personnel access to the notorious Pol-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul to carry out what is called 'protection work'. It is not known whether they will receive the opportunity to visit KHAD (secret service) houses and detention centres — other areas where torture and killing is alleged to take place. Also apparently discussed was the possibility of setting up through the Afghan Red Crescent in Kabul, a paraplegic unit, a facility which has proved very successful in Peshawar, Pakistan.

The conditions and treatment of prisoners in any war is a cause for concern. Behind the cloak of war, rules are often disregarded and impossible to enforce. Some Afghans have been painfully aware of this for a number of years. For them the war against Communism started 18 months before the Soviet invasion, in April 1978, when a small, and until then, little known Communist party seized power. With the change of government came arrest, torture, and execution for many religious leaders, intellectuals, and others not sympathising with the government's communist ideals.

Many of these people were interned in the prison at Pol-e-Charkhi, situated near the capital, Kabul. Although there are detention centres elsewhere in the country, for many Afghans, none conjures up such horrifying images as this prison.

Before the invasion, the government was able to clamp down on dissenters with little or no interference from the outside world. This was due to a lack of interest in the affairs of Afghanistan, despite a number of aid programmes, principally carried out by the Soviet Union and the United States in attempts to maintain their influence. Only when the flow of refugees increased dramatically after the Soviet invasion in December 1979 did the true picture start to emerge of the fate of many of those detained by the previous regime. In one of many incidents, in the summer of 1979, 300 Shi'ite Hazara prisoners were driven to a field outside Kabul, where half were soaked in petrol and then set on fire, and the other half buried alive by a bulldozer.

With world attention focused on the country after the invasion, the new President, Babrak Karmal, took advantage of the propaganda value of the previous regime's oppression and accused his predecessors of the murder of one million people. Although an exaggerated figure it appears possible that 30,000 executions took place at Pol-e-Charkhi alone, without taking into account the other detention centres, in the period between April 1978 and December 1979. In a heavily publicised move in January 1980, the

new government freed many prisoners from Pol-e-Charkhi, who, it was revealed, were government sympathisers. Subsequent riots by those remaining forced the release of all those held.

However, as the war stepped up against the Soviet-backed government and the Soviet forces, it was not long before the prisons started to fill again with their opponents. With restrictions on entry into the country making it difficult to investigate conditions and alleged atrocities, reliance has had to be made on eyewitnesses and personal reports. Felix Ermacora's report for the United Nations on human rights in Afghanistan indicates a gross abuse of people's rights, including mass detention, torture and killing.

Other reports have similar findings. The Helsinki Watch report on Afghanistan published in December 1985 reinforces the UN report in that it is not just resistance fighters who are abused and killed in prison. One of many examples, an 18 year-old girl described how she was imprisoned for distributing opposition leaflets: "I was arrested on the fourth of Aqrab last year (October 27, 1984). Two days before I had gone to Khairkhana to distribute shabnameh (underground leaflets), and I was marked absent from school. On Saturday I returned to school and took an examination. After I left school, they followed me, and when I got home, I found that a group of people had searched my home. They arrested us (her and her cousin) and took us to KHAD in Sheshdarak.

"During the day I was not tortured.



At night, between one and two, I was tortured. They used electric shocks, held our feet and beat them, and asked about our relations with the Mujahideen, with what group we were working, where we got the leaflets. Despite all this I did not confess.

"For the electric shocks there was a new machine brought from the Soviet Union. They fixed wires around the wrist. There was a chair on which they made you sit. They tied us to it and connected the wires to the electricity. They then pushed a switch. The chair turned around in a circle. When they connected it to the electricity, the chair moved so fast it made me dizzy. I was tortured like this for 15 days, between one and four in the morning. All the interrogators were men.

"We felt it was a Soviet-made machine, because the members of the KHAD were talking about it themselves, saying the new imported machine works well and really makes the people confess easily." (Testimony of former student from Zarghuna high school. Interview: August 1985 Helsinki Watch)

But inhumane treatment is not solely the province of the Afghan government and the Soviet forces. Responding to the heavy military pressure and the death and extreme treatment that many have received, the Mujahideen have often treated prisoners ruthlessly. Writing for *The Sunday Times*, film producer Jeff Harmon described an incident he witnessed in 1985:

"In Malajat (outside Kandahar, at the headquarters of resistance leader Haji Abdul Latif) I saw 12 Afghan army prisoners lined up in chains before a judge named Malawi Abdul Bari, who was awaiting orders to execute them from the guerrillas' high command in Peshawar, Pakistan. Bari claims to have executed 2,500 prisoners.

The judge told me: 'I have personally slit the throats of 1,000 Khalqis. I have sent 500 Russian infidels to the gallows.' Other prisoners, he said, were shot, decapitated or stoned to death.

This information was given in front of the 12 prisoners, whose own fate seemed certain. They listened impassively, while the judge's chief executioner, Muhammad Juma, fondled an axe and grinned. 'This is no ordinary axe,' he said. 'This is for halal (execution by blade).

But Bari's brand of justice is swift and formal compared with that of the Mujahideen at Markazee Apo (sic), a Hezbi-Islami guerrilla camp in Kandahar province. There, 12 prisoners, presumably Russian, were recently bayoneted to death. The stench from their decomposing bodies, buried in makeshift graves, permeates the camp."

However, this is on the extreme end of the spectrum. Despite the problems of security, accommodation, and food, some Mujahideen groups are realising the political capital to be made from

keeping prisoners alive, apart from the possibility of exchanging them for captured Mujahideen. The resistance military commander from Herat, Allahuddin, on a recent visit to London, told of how his group had exchanged, on three occasions, one Soviet soldier for three or four Mujahideen held by the Soviet authorities.

The welfare of prisoners is one of the concerns of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In an agreement reached in December 1981 with most of the resistance groups in Peshawar, it was stated that in return for attempting to obtain the release of Mujahideen held by the Afghan government, the ICRC should have the right to interview Soviet captives, giving them a choice of either two years' internment in Switzerland and then the opportunity to return home, or if they wished, to remain with the Mujahideen.

Although most of the Mujahideen leaders in Peshawar agreed to this arrangement, with the result that some of the Soviet prisoners were interviewed and given this choice, it normally took a great deal of time and effort to reach the interviewing stage. Even then their problems were not over. Most of the prisoners were confused and frightened, not knowing who to trust, and appeared unsure of the sincerity of the ICRC of whom they may never have heard.

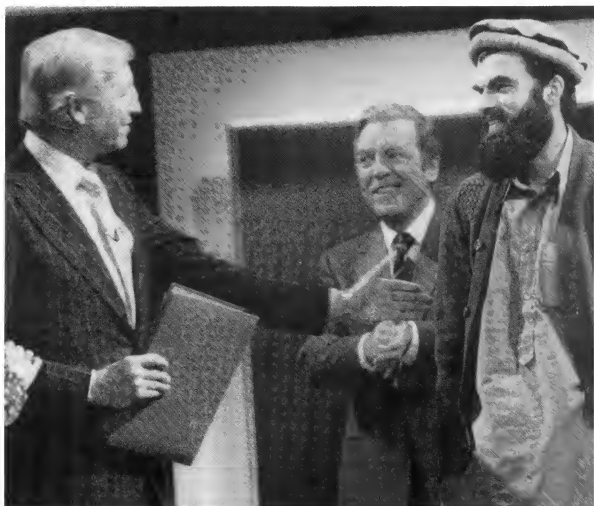
In theory Mujahideen commanders were meant to refer to their counterparts in Peshawar before a decision could be made about the future of their Soviet prisoners. With poor communications and often only tenuous

allegiance to the parties in Peshawar, fears were expressed that many prisoners were not reaching Peshawar to be interviewed. To date only 11 Soviet prisoners have been interned in Switzerland. The scheme has been a failure.

This may have something to do with the fact that during the early stages of the war the attempts of the ICRC to free Mujahideen from detention in Afghanistan also failed. Only after a great deal of negotiation were four members of the ICRC allowed to visit Kabul in the autumn 1982 to document prisoners in Pol-e-Charkhi. From the middle of August to the beginning of October they interviewed and registered 338 prisoners out of thousands held, but were forced to leave when their visas were not extended.

Much criticism has been levelled at the Red Cross by the Mujahideen that they have achieved little or nothing in the past concerning Mujahideen held by the Afghan Government. Although Soviet prisoners have been handed over to the Red Cross by the Mujahideen, the same does not hold true for the Afghan Government. The Mujahideen are naturally bitter about an arrangement which they feel is very much one-sided.

Whether this recent move by the Red Cross will genuinely achieve anything or be halted, as with their previous attempt, remains to be seen. Although the Afghan Government does not consider Mujahideen detainees to be 'prisoners of war', they are under pressure to put on a good face to the outside world.



One of the many Mujahideen taken prisoner, or executed, by the Afghan Government, Abdul Wahid (right) is at present being held in the notorious prison at Pol-e-Charkhi.

Seen here during a lighter moment, during his visit to Britain, on 'This is Your Life' with Sandy Gall.



# HERAT

## "DUST OF THE SAINTS"

Due to difficult access, little is heard of events in the west of Afghanistan. The following articles profile the area of Herat, presenting past and present aspects of both the city and the province.

Compiled by Julian Gearing and James Henderson

Large parts of the historical city of Herat, which played a major role in the intellectual development of Islam, have been destroyed. For the past six years Soviet and Afghan Government forces have repeatedly shelled and bombed the city and surrounding countryside in attempts to evict the Mujahideen and their civilian support.

A once prosperous and fertile agricultural area, the Herat plain, which previously fed nearly two million people is now almost completely deserted. Once thriving villages are empty and in ruins, their inhabitants having taken refuge in neighbouring Iran. Yet the men who remain to fight, mostly Mujahideen belonging to the Jamiat-i-Islami party, receive little real support from Iran. Living amongst the ruins, the Mujahideen are armed with, primarily captured weapons and ammunition, though militia and Afghan Army personnel are not averse to selling them the latter. Unlike the border with Pakistan to the south and east, there is no flow of weapons from Iran to the Mujahideen of Herat.

"This is a real problem", stated Commander Allahuddin, military commander of Herat, during an interview on his recent visit to London. "We lack heavy weapons, especially anti-aircraft weapons. And we lack food."

Attempts are being made in some areas to grow wheat for bread, but with many areas liable to be attacked, fields lie empty. Another major problem is lack of medical supplies. "Our wounded are left stranded, left untreated in houses on the border. We have few medical supplies and no facilities for adequate treatment. Our men's morale is being affected by this. They see their brothers lying in pain, it has a bad effect," said Allahuddin.

We want the world to know what has happened to Herat," said Ghulam Rasul, Chairman of the Jamiat Cultural Committee, in a recent interview with journalist Stefan Lindgren. "More people died here than in Hiroshima", he claimed, "In Herat province the bombings have lasted seven years; they started one year before the Soviet invasion. We estimate that more than 100,000 people have died here."

Although the Soviet and Afghan government forces hold little actual ground and seldom leave their bases, their operations have had a devastating effect on Herat, and in some areas of the surrounding provinces. Last October, a large Soviet force attempted to clear the city of Mujahideen and make movement difficult. Some central parts of the city, including the Masjed-e-Jom'e (Friday Mosque) and the fort, were cut off from the other parts by an iron curtain of mines. Outside this lethal perimeter, the area is considered a free-fire zone by the Soviet forces, often shelling and rocketing from their bases to the north and south of the city.

The destruction of mosques and cultural sites in Herat is a severe blow to the Muslims of Afghanistan. The area is considered to be the religious and cultural centre of the country as the former capital in the Timurid empire from Istanbul to the Indus. It is on UNESCO's list of cities especially worth protecting. Today there is little left standing.

Masjed-e-Jom'e (Friday Mosque). Photo: J. Gearing 1977



# BY TRUCK TO HERAT: A CAMERAMAN'S IMPRESSIONS

*By Habib Kawyani*

In a very personal account, Habib Kawyani, a professional Afghan cameraman whose credits include 'Night Comes to Kandahar' (ITV), describes a visit he made to Herat in 1983. Due to difficulty with access, few journalists have visited this area and it receives little news coverage.

As September dawned on Pakistan, I found myself in the dull, monochromatic city of Quetta, which is both geographically and strategically important due to its relative proximity to the Afghanistan border. I had just finished filming a documentary for a young Oxford University undergraduate and my stay in Quetta was merely meant as a period of recuperation before returning to the grey skies of London.

At times I got the distinct impression that Quetta was like a frontier town. Nobody seemed to stay there for very long. Everyone was either going somewhere or coming back. One was generally aware that as one person left, another person arrived. I was constantly amused by the notion, that whilst the city's population maintained a precarious equilibrium the faces were always different. Quetta operated as a massive amplifier for news, rumours and information. It seemed that everyone who entered Quetta had a story to tell. Night after night, I would sit at the Bloom

Star hotel and I would listen to a cacophony of stories and news embroidered by a blanket of exaggeration.

It was during the course of one of these particular evenings that I first heard of Ismail Khan, who had reputedly established a thoroughly organized and effective guerrilla resistance to the Russian occupation forces in Afghanistan. The more I heard about Ismail Khan the more fascinated I became. I learned that he was based in Herat in West Afghanistan.

Herat is the most strategically significant city in Afghanistan and also one of the most heavily fortified. Rumour had it that the Mujahideen were managing to put up stiff resistance against the Russians. Motivated by my desire to film an interview with Ismail Khan I decided to undertake the long and dangerous journey to Herat.

I visited the headquarters of the Jamiat-i-Islami in Quetta. The Jamiat are the main political faction within Herat and consequently they would be both prepared and capable of arranging my passage to Herat.

As it turned out, I had two choices, I could either spend twenty five days travelling across the desert or I could travel by the quicker route through Iran and onto Herat. The latter choice was more desirable, however it would mean that my British companion would be unable to make the journey. I

decided to jettison my companion and travel alone through Iran.

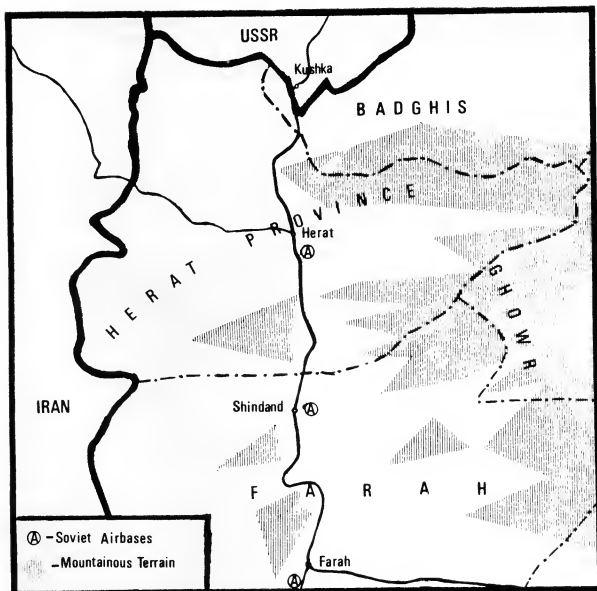
I soon discovered that the Jamiat-Islami office in Quetta had a particular aptitude for inefficiency. It took them two months to arrange my passage to Herat. Eventually, I left Quetta for Rabat where the Mujahideen were waiting for the Iranian government to grant them permission to take a cargo of weapons and medical supplies through Iran and onto Herat. I was shocked to discover that the Mujahideen had been waiting in Rabat for six months. These were frustrating times for the Mujahideen, who seemed to be fighting a war of bureaucratic indifference as well as a war of attrition.

Two days later I travelled to Zahedan. Customs officials sealed my camera bags in order to prevent me from filming in Iran, an act that highlighted the Iranians' mistrust of journalists and film makers.

From Zahedan I travelled on to the Iranian border with Afghanistan. My Mujahideen escort had been joined by three truck loads of Afghan refugees who had been working in Iran in order to earn money for their families and for the Mujahideen. I learnt that it was Ismail Khan himself who first organized the idea of collective fund raising. In the pre-Khan days, individuals would sponsor their own token resistance against the Russians. However, Ismail Khan's initiative meant that the Mujahideen had a greater strike force. He had realised that the key to effective resistance was organization and the notion of Afghan refugees channelling funds into the



Mujahideen at prayer — Herat.  
Photo: H. Kawyani



hands of the Mujahideen on a collective basis was the first step towards an organized and effective resistance.

As I travelled with the refugees, I learnt of horror stories about the treatment of Afghans in Iran. Their status is that of second class citizens. They spend long, exhausting days working for little financial reward. Their movement is restricted and at night they return to the confines of refugee camps. Irrespective of these terrible conditions, there are almost one million Afghans working in Iran. As we approached the border control I discovered that the customs officials of the Iranian revolutionary guard were about to carry out one final indignity against their Afghan neighbours before allowing them to leave Iran. Illegally, they instructed us that no one could take more than 20,000 Iranian rials into Afghanistan. Everyone was searched thoroughly. Money and belongings were confiscated. Only when the customs officials had satisfied their greed were we allowed to cross the border and enter Afghanistan.

The journey to Herat was punctuated by a series of minor disasters. Our trucks were constantly sinking in deep, glistening sand dunes. Finally, we trundled into Herat. Russian jets blasted the sky above our heads, a timely reminder of the Russians' massive presence in the arid city. The main military base was to the north east of the city. Consequently, we headed south into the Mujahideen controlled areas. By this time we had waved farewell to our refugee travelling companions. Escorted by a small group of Mujahideen, I started my long trek

to a guerrilla stronghold and eventually on to Ismail Khan. We walked through the night and finally reached our destination.

Herat is a flat dusty city, making it a particularly difficult area for the guerrilla forces since their cover is limited. Helicopter gunships are a common sight as they survey the ground for pockets of resistance.

Eventually, I met Ismail Khan. He is a small, diminutive man. His steadfast gaze conveys a sense of incredible intensity. Together with his guerrilla commander, Allahuddin, he is possibly the most wanted man in Afghanistan. I was soon to find out why. Ismail Khan explained that he had up to 15,000 Jamiat activists under his command. However, it appeared that he was more than willing to leave the military side of the Jamiat's operation to Allahuddin. Ismail himself concentrated on the much broader social and economic activities of the Jamiat-i-Islami. I got the distinct impression that without Ismail or Allahuddin the Jamiat resistance would crumble. For this reason they were rarely seen together. When they did meet (at the odd committee meeting) they were always heavily protected against possible attacks from the Russian security forces. Informers are common in Herat. The government would pay huge amounts of money to anyone who was willing to tell them of the exact whereabouts of Ismail or Allahuddin. For this reason, every precaution was taken to protect any information that detailed their forthcoming schedule.

Ismail Khan is an educated man. His genuine humility and astute perception

Commander Allahuddin and Dr Kohyar on recent visit to London. Photo: J. Gearing



of complex political events make him a born leader. He is a revered figure throughout Herat. At one time he was a commander in the Afghan army and therefore his military experience is second to none. He also has a highly trained aptitude for strategy.

Ismail's organization covers a vast range of social and political spheres. They not only carry out guerrilla activities against the Russian occupation forces, but they help with developing their own law and judicial system in Herat. Ismail is very keen on the idea of agriculture and working the land. He sees the earth as 'God's gift' and therefore to dismiss the earth as a barren wasteland is quintessentially the same as dismissing God.

Education is another area of great importance. Ismail is perceptive enough to realise that physical strength is not necessarily the only attribute that the Mujahideen need to fight the Russians. A more potent weapon is mental agility and the individual's ability to use his weapons with a degree of strategic dexterity.

I went on to film a Mujahideen training camp. As the years go on it appears that more and more educated people are leaving the Afghan government to fight with the Mujahideen. Nurses, doctors and administrators are all defecting as they become aware of the inhumane tactics deployed by the Soviet occupation forces.

As I returned to Pakistan, I couldn't help but speak of my admiration for Ismail Khan and his highly sophisticated and organized party. Never before had I witnessed this level of organization within the Mujahideen. Perhaps Afghanistan needs more men like Ismail Khan and Allahuddin. Certainly, the Mujahideen resistance would be strengthened if their example were to be emulated throughout Afghanistan.



#### *PROFILE — Resistance*

Major party — Jamiat-i-Islami. Strength of Mujahideen estimated to be between 5,000-15,000 (includes Ghoor, Badghis, and Farah).  
Amir — Mohammed Ismail Khan. Military commander — Allahuddin.

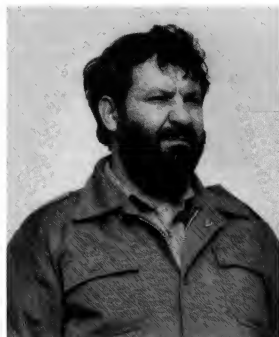
The administration meets every 10 days and includes representatives from the Judiciary, Education, Information, Culture, Medical, and Military departments.

Problems — poorly armed, worsening food situation, lack of medical facilities.

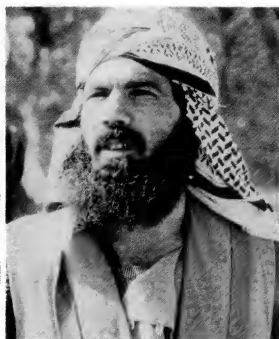
Other parties (estimated to be in the 100s) — Hesb Ullah: Shia group, backed by Iran; estimated to be 300; leader Quri Yak Dast (has cooperated with Ismail Khan) — Harakat-i-Islami: Shia group; estimated to be 200 (suffered from defections to Government and Jamiat — see, Militia) — Hisb-i-Islami (Hekmatyar): estimated to be between 600-1,000 — Hisb-i-Islami (Khaless): number unknown.

Left:

Professor Rabbani — leader of the Jamiat-i-Islami party and spokesman for the Islamic Alliance of Afghan Mujahideen (1 April to end of June). The majority of Mujahideen in and around Herat are affiliated to Jamiat. Photo: H. Kawayani



Commander Allahuddin — military leader of the Mujahideen in Herat. Photo: J. Gearing



Ismail Khan — Amir of Herat. Photo: H. Kawayani

#### *PROFILE — Ismail Khan, Amir of Herat*

Born in Shindand, from poor background. School — Herat, Habishaula Military College in Kabul. Joined 17th Infantry Division of Afghan Army in Herat (has two brothers still in the Division).

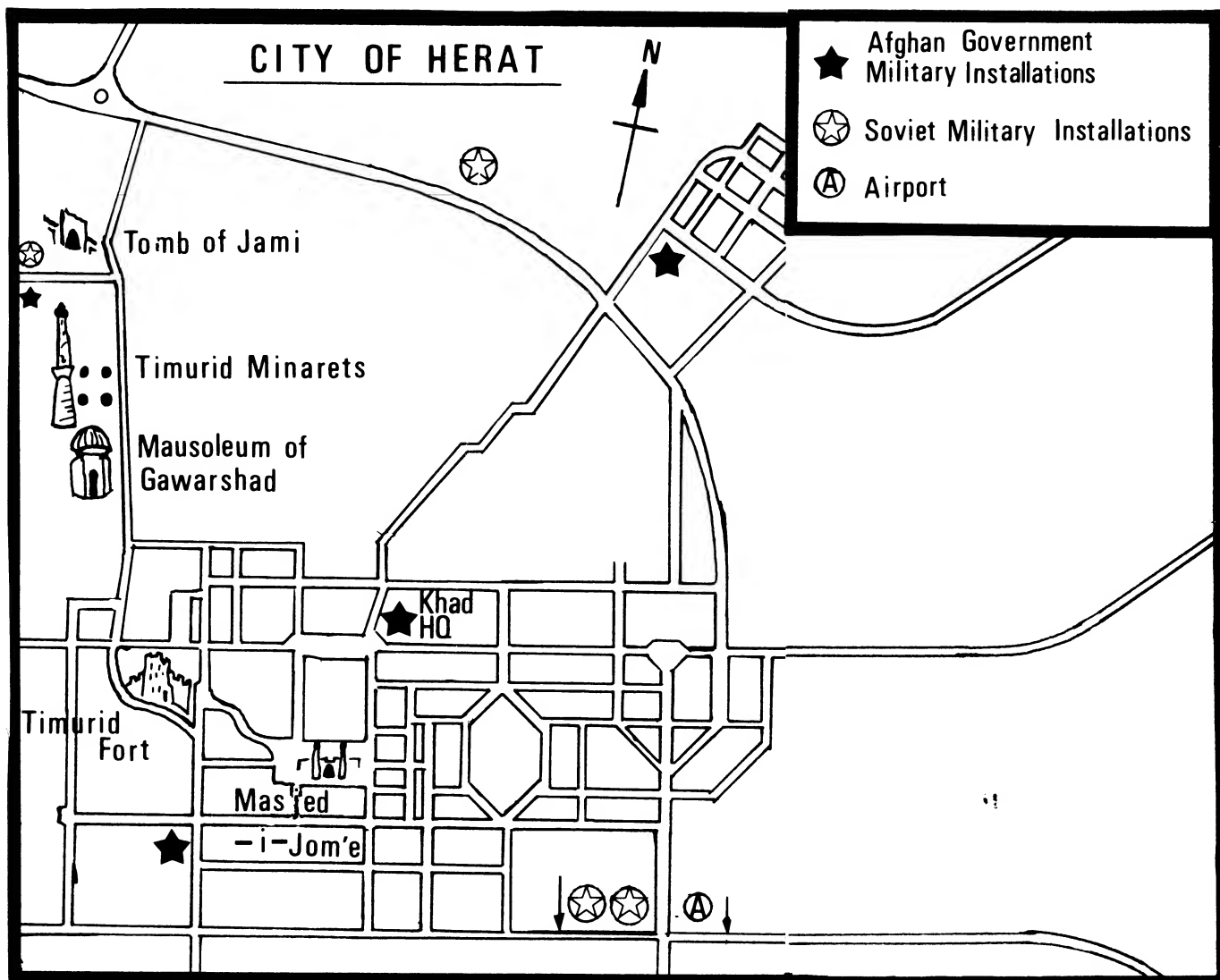
Involved in the Herat revolt in mid-March 1979, in which there were riots and mutinies among the troops. Revolt heavily suppressed. Fled to Iran. Returned after 2-3 weeks, to Gulran in Herat, to organise people. Disarmed Afghan Army border guards.

After 4 months in Gulran he went to the Jamiat office in Mashad and brought delegation to see his progress in Herat. He then travelled around Badghis, Ghoor, and Herat building up support.

Morale of population slumped after Soviet invasion. Population rallied after Ismail Khan travelled to Peshawar to obtain recognition from Jamiat, and returned to organise the Resistance. Elected Amir. Also gathered together educated people from the University of Kabul and organised them into sections.



The morale of the Mujahideen in Herat, although reportedly high, is beginning to suffer as increasing numbers of injured fail to receive adequate treatment, and are left marooned on the border with Iran. Photo: H. Kawayani



Soviet MI-8 Helicopter  
Photo: J. Gearing

**PROFILE — Soviet Military/DRA Forces/DRA Militia — Strategic Situation**

Large percentage of the land is flat, and is directly exposed to Soviet ground and air attacks. Herat Province shares a border with the Soviet Union and Iran.

The Iranian authorities hamper the movement of Mujahideen on their border.

Herat, Ghoor, Badghis, and Farah are taken as one security zone by the Soviet and Afghan Government forces — chief: Major General Khalilullah. Zone considered to be strategically important due to: Soviet border; the road from Torghundi — Kandahar — Kabul; the border with Iran; the proximity to the Persian Gulf.

Major Base — Shindand Airbase with heavy underground installations. Unconfirmed reports suggest long-range missiles within range of the Persian Gulf.

Airforce — 355 Air Brigade (DRA), plus Soviet personnel. Aircraft — include MIG 27, Ilyushin, SU-25 Frog-foot, MI-8 helicopters, MI-24 helicopter gunships, etc.

Herat City -posts (DRA+SOV)

Herat Airport — posts (DRA+SOV)

Mir Daoud — base (SOV)

Zinda Jan — base (SOV), possible uranium deposits

Border Areas — 5th Frontier Brigade (DRA)

Land Forces — include: 5th Guards Motor Rifle Division (SOV); Special Operations Brigade (SOV — Spetsnaz) 600-1000; 17th Infantry Division (DRA); plus subordinate units — 2nd Regiment, 28th Brigade, 21st Mechanised Brigade.

Total Strength — Soviet Forces 15,000 (?), DRA Forces 6-8000(?)

DRA Militia — The bulk of the militia was originally formed when Shirakhah, commander of the Harakat-i-Islami Resistance, defected to the Government side with 800 men in 1981. Following the defection, some Harakat members joined Jamiat. Shirakhah's area of influence was over the villages to the east of Herat city. Although he was killed in 1984, the Afghan Government's policy of trying to buy up people in the villages continues. The failure to bolster the Afghan Army has resulted in more reliance on the militia, police, and the KHAD (security service).

(DRA — Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. SOV — Soviet)

# THE DEVASTATION OF HERAT'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

by Bruce Wannell

Herat has, since the Communist coup in April 1978, been one of the most active and determined centres of resistance, especially since the Russian occupation. There have been heavy losses both in human life and in terms of property destroyed, yet still the people of Herat cling to their native soil with a tenacity that is far from the conceptions of the average Western, mobile town-dweller.

In conversation, the Heratis constantly refer to their home town as the soil and dust of the saints, "KHAK — E — OWLI YA", a land impregnated with the memories of past generations of saints, scholars and poets, whose burial places were often embellished with fine buildings and became shrines for pilgrimage and centres of Sufi devotions on Thursday evenings for the local population. The destruction of these holy shrines and their places of prayer, and also their homes and shops has not lessened the Heratis' affection for their land. This is true also of the rest of Afghanistan, but what differentiates Herat is that, along with Ghazni, though to a greater degree, it was the centre of a brilliant civilisation that spread far beyond the confines of present day Afghanistan.

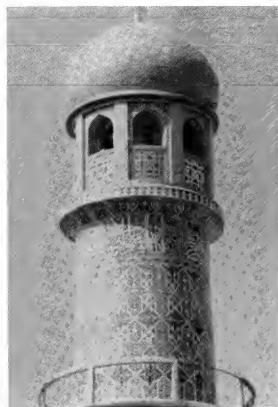
Ghiyas-ud-Din-Ghowri is buried in the Great Mosque of Herat, which he had built in 1201 A.D. when he ruled an empire that stretched to India. His mosque and city were sacked by the Mongols in 1221 and again 1222 in an onslaught paralleled in barbarity and destructiveness only by the current devastation.

The city lay abandoned for 15 years until new rulers emerged in the Pax Mongolica: the local dynasty founded by Shams-ud-Din Kart, who was confirmed in office by the Mongol overlord Hulagu in 1255, lasted till shortly before the conquest by Teimur the Lame (Tamberlane), who took Herat in 1381.

The subsequent Teimurid rulers, Shah Rukh and his wife Gowhar Shad, their son Ulugh Beg, the astronomer, Abu Sa'id and Sultan Hussein Baiqara the calligrapher embellished the city and the whole province of Khorasan. Later, the invasion by the Shaibanid Uzbeks in 1506 and the constant struggles that ensued with Safavid Iran, put Herat in the position of a disputed border town, unable to preserve more than a vestige of its former glory. This continued into the Qajar and Durrani periods in the 19th century and led to the destruction of the Musalla of Gowhar Shad by British sappers in the 1880's. Since then, Herat has been a quiet provincial capital, centre of a fertile oasis set between the mountains

of Ghowr and the arid plains along the Iranian border.

From the Ghowrid period remain the tomb and one portal of Ghiyas-ud-Din Ghowri in Herat and the victory minaret at Jam, along with the remains of the brick madrasa at Shah-e-Mashhad in Badghis. There are also the shells of two domes at the pilgrimage centre of 'Abdul Qader at Chesht, from where the Cheshti order of Sufis spread to become the most important in the Indian subcontinent in the Moghul period (see: the remaining shrines at Ajmer, Fatehpur Sikri, and Delhi). Dating from the pre-Mongol period is the tomb and shrine of Mohammed Ghazi, said to have Seljuq glazed tiles, at Fushani, formerly the Pushang, which was ploughed into the ground by the Mongols: rather in the same way that the Russians have bulldozed large parts of Herat city.



Damaged or destroyed? — one of the minarets of the Friday Mosque.  
Photo: J. Gearing 1977

From the Teimurid period remain parts of the Great Mosque which was retiled in 1498, and the famous bronze cauldron which used to stand in the courtyard of the mosque. This has disappeared, apparently taken into safe-keeping by the Russians, along with the "Haft Qalam" (7 chisel) black marble tombstone carved with intricate floral arabesques in high relief which was said to be at the tomb of Hussein Baiqara till 1983.

In the early part of 1986, the area around the mosque was subjected to a rigorous house to house search, and local population crowded into the mosque. It was then shelled, with the result that the eastern eivan and minaret were destroyed. 70 people

were killed and 40 seriously wounded.

The remaining minarets in the Musalla and madrasa of Gowhar Shad which stood some way outside the city were damaged in bombing which took place in the autumn of last year: two, including the oldest, the Menara Nahbas, were totally destroyed: they still retained some of their original tiling of faience mosaic in brilliant turquoise and lapis blue. The Teimurid artists brought the technique of faience mosaic tiling to an unparalleled degree of perfection, as can be seen in the remaining examples at the mosque of Gowhar Shad in Mashhad, the Madrasa at Khwaf/Khargerd, and at the Shrine at the border at Tayebad. On the Afghan side of the border was the domed tomb know as Gowhar Shad Begum at Kohsar, which was bombed and destroyed in the spring of 1985.

The tomb and shrine of the Pir-e-Herat, Khwaja 'Abdullah' Ansari, the great saint of Herat is to be found at Gazer-Gah on the low hills outside the city. He was the first sufi to leave us records of his mystical states in Persian; his Munajat is to Persian-speaking Muslims what the Imitatio Christi is to Christians. Ansari died in 1088 and his tomb was renewed in 1425 by Shah Rukh. It contains some of the finest Teimurid tilework anywhere, including also some very fine calligraphy, mostly religious in nature, and some of it the Pir's own rubayat.

The shrine is not too badly damaged, but because it is within a few hundred yards of the Communist base of Zulmay-Kot, local people no longer have access to it, long their favourite place of retreat and relaxation in spring and summer, as well as a focus of their devotional life.

The shrines of two of the Pir-e-Herat's teachers have both been slightly damaged and are also difficult for most of the local population to reach. The first was Khwaja Mohammed Taki (the 'Vine-Clipper') and the second Khwaja Ghaltan (called the 'Roller' — because, when he reached Herat, he exclaimed "Here is the Dust of the Saints!") and refusing to walk on ground so holy, he rolled vigorously to the place where he died and where his shrine was built; pilgrims to his grave must roll if their wishes are to be fulfilled). In Chesht, the famous theological school has been forced to flee, as it was too close to the road leading to Chagh-Cheran. In nearby Obe, where the hot springs flow is the shrine of Gandom 'Ali (Wheat-'Ali) where there is a tree popularly believed to relieve tooth-ache and where the shrine attendants give out grains of the sacred wheat. They have reputedly cured not only an epileptic girl but also a frenzied 'Boz-Kashi' horse belonging to the local leader of the Pushtun Kakar tribe.

The shrine of 'Abdul Walid al-Muhaddith used to stand in the fields far from the villages about 20 kms from the town. It was a favourite Ziarat at

No Ruz, the ancient new year, celebrated at the spring equinox, and people came from all over the province, both to present their petitions and to bury their dead in the holy soil to ensure a better kick-off at resurrection. The shrine and the nearest village were bombed in the summer of 1985, as part of the policy of emptying the agricultural areas surrounding towns and forcing the civilians to flee. The villagers brought their wounded and their dead to the shrine and bombers came again, this time killing many more civilians as they were burying their dead.

In the autumn of 1985, the tombs of the lineal descendants of the Prophet, Shahzadeh Qasem and 'Abdullah were totally destroyed by Russian bombs. The mosque of Chehel Sotun (40 columns) at Ziarat-Jah in the plain leading towards the mountains of Zende-Jan, and the Khanegah of Mulla Kalan where there was a fine calligraphic frieze by Sultan Hussein Baiqara, were largely destroyed 3 years ago.

In the spring of 1985, the tomb of the eminent theologian, Fakhruddin Razi (obit 1210) was destroyed by Russian bombs. There, fighting part-ridges used to be pitted against one another and pilgrims mixed piety with sport and a private benefactor had recently endowed the saint with a new tomb and mosque-complex. Again, this bears out the plan to destroy the people's attachment to and identification with their land, in an area with no strategic significance. The Russians are fighting not only a military and

economic war, but also an ideological one in which they want to destroy the Afghan's cultural identity and recreate them in their own image.

Other victims of this policy are the tombs of secular 'culture-heroes'. One of the earliest Turkish Language poets, the great Mir 'Ali Shir Nawai was a minister and friend to Sultan Hussein Baiqara, the Persian language poet and head of the Naqshbandi sufi order at this period. The Sultan's religious epics are the last flowering of the classical Khorassani style of Persian literature, which decisively influenced the development of the writers of Persian in Moghul India, 'Abdur-Rahman Jami. Hussein Wa'ez Kashafi (the Preacher) and all round litterateur at the same court, whose retelling of the political fables of 'Kalila and Demna' remained the most popular book for centuries, had the mehrab (prayer-niche) of his tomb, dating from the late Teimurid period, destroyed when it was hit by a rocket in 1985.

The tomb of the painter Behzad who perfected the art of miniature illustrations in manuscripts, has also been destroyed. His manuscript of Sa'di's *Golestan* is one of the treasured possessions of the Egyptian national Library in Cairo, and it was he who was invited by the Victorious Safavids in the early 16th century to Tabriz to direct the royal library and manuscript atelier, returning to his beloved Herat only to be buried.

We must turn to the Memoirs of the Emperor Baber where he records the cultivated life at the Teimurid court, or to the sketch done in 1885 of the

Musalla by Durrand of the Boundary Commission, or to the early photographs by Niedermeyer in order to have some idea of the city as it was. Now the city is in ruins; its shops and bazars empty, the trades and handicrafts dead, the population has fled to Iran or to the hills, the past is bulldozed into the ground. The few thousand remaining people are surrounded by concrete walls, with only two exits, one the road to the crossing point into Russia at Torghondi, the other the main road south to Kandahar.

In 1982, the mosque and village of Howz-e-Karbas were bombed and over 4,000 houses were destroyed, in order to flush out the Mujahideen following Commander Allahuddin who was receiving help in the village and food from the surrounding orchards and market-gardens.

The Heratis speak of the ruins as the 'Hiroshima' of Herat. With so many killed or fled, one asks when the Afghans will tire of this war, or when the Russians will tire of this slaughter and destruction. On the one hand, the devotion to the Khak-e-Owliya, the intense local patriotism, does not allow any thought of giving up the struggle to hold militarily the ground in and around the city; on the other hand, the Russians are prepared to use any means to establish a strangle-hold on the area. Tacitus's bitter words about an earlier empire strike home: "Desolationem faciunt, pacem appellat!" (They turn the land into a wilderness and say they have brought peace!).



Herat at peace — Friday Mosque. Photo: J. Gearing 1977



# WHERE IS THE NIGHTINGALE? — THE MUSIC OF HERAT

Veronica Doubleday

Before the present war, Herat was a city of poetry, music and song. People loved music and there were many talented amateur and professional performers. Amongst the many painful losses Herat has seen since the outbreak of war, we must also count the cost of the disruption of a precious musical culture which was a unique blend of Afghan, Iranian, Central Asian, Indian and indigenous influences.

The most important context for all types of music-making was — and still must be — that of marriage celebrations, which were held separately for men and women. In the city male guests were entertained with popular songs and dance music performed by a professional band, normally a singer/harmonium player, accompanied by *tabla* drums (originally from North India) and stringed instruments, the *dutar* (a Herati long-necked lute) and the *rubab* (the Afghan short-necked lute). In the villages and amongst poorer city-dwellers music was provided by *dutars* accompanied by the local clay pot drum. Oboe and drum music (*sazdohol*) was used for processions and traditional whirling and stick dances.

Amongst the women, wedding celebrations were more protracted. Bands of professional women musicians played all evening and throughout the following day, led by a singer/harmonium player accompanied by *tabla* and one or two *dairahs* (large tambourines). Otherwise women provided their own entertainment with group singing, drumming, clapping and dancing.

Aside from weddings, Spring-time occasioned a period of intense musical

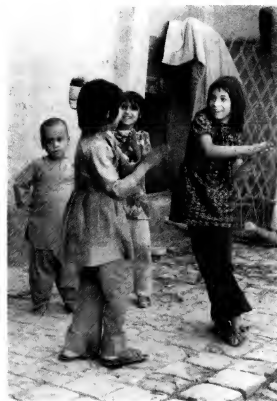
activity at weekly men's fairs. Tea-house owners hired bands to entertain their clients, and *sazdohol* players were in evidence. Recently the month of Ramazan had also become important for evening concerts, when people relaxed from their fast. Entrepreneurs hired prestigious bands from Kabul for the whole month, inviting famous *ustads* such as Rahim Bakhsh or the female singer, Mahwash. These concerts were important cultural transmissions from the distant capital and included serious classical music and devotional poetry. Recently provision was made for a screened area so that women could also attend.



Woman dancing and playing the *dairah* with her children. Photo: V. Doubleday

Amongst women, music-making was somewhat limited by the constraints of purdah. Most women only played under certain circumstances: when men were absent from the house and when there was a legitimate reason for celebrating. They played folk songs, popular radio songs or drum rhythms for dancing. Knowledge of the oral poetical tradition was important in the more rural style of singing known as *Charbeiti*, where verses were improvised. Women did not play stringed instruments and were mostly limited to the use of the *dairah*. Girls who had not reached puberty were allowed considerable freedom to sing, drum and dance at home and they were avid music-makers.

Music provided an important source of entertainment, particularly for women, who had fewer alternative outlets. They rarely attended public entertainments such as the cinema or theatre, and although radios and cassette-players had become very popular, they were usually controlled by men.



Young girls dancing for their own entertainment. Pre-war Herat. Photo: V. Doubleday

Historically Islam has looked askance at music, thinking it closely connected with dance and pleasure, and it is inevitable that the present desire to return to fundamentalist principles has dampened musical expression, particularly amongst women and girls. In any case now that Afghanistan has been plunged into a state of intense and continuous mourning, many forms of music-making will have been curtailed: no-one would want it thought that they had for one moment forgotten their communal grief. Heratis observed a strict ban on music for forty days after a death and would not play within earshot of neighbours who were in mourning, so the excitable music-making of girls would now certainly be suppressed.

The equation of the women's drum with celebration is unfortunate, as it is also used to accompany indigenous folk poetry which lends itself particularly well to the expression of present feelings, placing a heavy emphasis upon pain and lament. It was primarily concerned with unrequited love, but could equally express the sense of separation and loss engendered by the absence of loved ones fighting or by the flight of refugees. Love lyrics also combined a spiritual aspect, expressing the soul's longing for God, which is compared to the nightingale's love of the rose. In some verses the lover calls upon God for help in times of difficulty, also a sentiment eminently suitable to present times.

No doubt Herat's rich musical heritage is being adapted to current needs, particularly through emphasis upon religious themes and extolling the heroic exploits of the resistance. One can be sure that the nightingale has not flown, though the thorns of the rose be cruel.

(Veronica Doubleday is the author of "Three Women of Herat" and performed at the May Lausanne Festival of Afghan songs.)



Girl playing *dairah* and singing at a wedding. Pre-war Herat. Photo: V. Doubleday

# Subversion in Pakistan

by Olivier Roy

The Kabul regime has stepped up its propaganda campaign directed towards the tribes and political opposition in Pakistan. There are two different policies. The first is aimed to stir armed opposition from the tribes, according to the traditional Afghan claim for the so-called "Pashtunistan" or the Pakistani territories inhabited by Pathans. The second consists of using Pakistani political opposition to put pressure on the government for direct talks with Babrak's regime, and eventually to overthrow the present government.

The Kabul regime established a Ministry for Tribes and Nationalities (this is the official translation, but in Persian *vezarat-e aqwām wa qabāyēl* in fact means "Ministry of clans and tribes"). The activities of the Ministry, headed by Suleyman Laeq, are mostly directed towards tribal areas: this means the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan, populated by Pashtuns of Pathans, Baluchis and Nuristanis; tribal structure does not exist or is much weaker in the central, western and northern areas of Afghanistan. But this ministry is officially in charge of the Pashtun Pakistani tribes. Activities from the Ministry of Tribes are closely coordinated with those of the secret police or KHAD.

In 1985 the Kabul regime established a special structure to gather tribes from both sides of the border: the "Supreme Council of Tribes" (*jirga-ye ali-ye qabāyēl*, — *qabāyēl*, in Afghanistan traditionally refers to the border Pashtun tribes): this council was convened in Kabul on the 14th September 1985 with great pomp and ceremony. The Pakistani tribes were called to fight the "military regime" in Pakistan and to cut the supply roads of the "bandits": this last point seem to be the short term priority.

According to Kabul press, there were representatives of all the main Pakistani tribes: Mohmand, Salazaray, Bajauri, Otmankheyl, Shinwari, Afridi, Tori, Oradzay, Wazirri, Masud and Bithani. In the reports no difference was made between the Afghan and the Pakistani tribes, nor was there any mention of an independent "Pashtunistan": thus the desire for the annexation of Pakistani tribal territories by Kabul appears very clearly. Since that, the party newspaper *Haqiqat-e enqelab-e saur* carries on a regular column "The resistance of the Tribes against the Pakistani militarists". There are regular quotations of statements from tribal Pakistani leaders against Islamabad and reports of fierce fighting, even of "genocide" in Pakistani tribal areas.

There is also mention of "council of *ulema*" amongst Pakistani tribes (*Jamiat-e ulema*) who condemn Islamabad, especially among the Afridi, Mohmand and Bajauri (in fact Kabul's policy seems to have had some successes only among these three tribes). Thus Kabul is trying to give itself a pro-Islam and Pushtun nationalist facade. Knowing that tribes are traditionally fighting each other, and that they have in common only religion and customs, this policy to dismiss the pretensions of the Mujahideen to wage an authentic Jihad, or religious war, by presenting Kabul as supporting Islam, is the best way to undermine any solidarity between tribes and Mujahideen or between pro-Kabul and pro-Mujahideen tribes.

This policy is carried on through two proxies: traditional tribal leaders (like Wali Khan Kukikheyl) and Pushtun nationalists (like Wali Khan, son of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who is now heading the National Democratic Party in NWFP). Both are long term opponents of Islamabad. Wali Khan Kukikheyl, head of an Afridi sub-tribe, has tradi-

activities of this last group are coordinated from Kabul by Ajmal Khattack, both Kukikheyl and Wali Khan make regular trips to Kabul. This use of traditional leaders is the strength but also the weakness of Kabul policy towards the tribal areas; by using traditional allegiances and rivalries it has an immediate effect, but in the same time this policy fits very well with the patterns of traditional society, which Islamabad is quite used to handling to its benefit. This is not ideological subversion, appealing to the masses against the establishment, but the use of a part of the local establishment, against an other part, supported by the Pakistani authorities. Thus, by playing the traditional tribal game, the Pakistani authorities were able to settle the outbreaks of violence in the tribal areas, by using local levies and local tribal militias: regular troops with tanks were called in for just one operation against the smugglers market of Barrah in December Wali Khan Kukikheyl saw his house burnt by tribal levies, not by the regular army, and was forced into exile. Moreover the militias set up in Pakistan by the Kabul regime to fight the Mujahideen did very badly and most of them joined the "bandits" in Nazyan area (Nangarhar), last March. There is no present threat for the Pakistanis in the tribal areas: most of the tribesman, who are making a lot of money in the trading of drugs and arms are reluctant to wage a real war and have no interest in a victory for the Kabul regime, which would bring an end to all their lucrative activities. According to Mujahideen sources there is no cut in the supply routes due to the border tribes (except in Kurram area, but this is not a direct result of Kabul policy: the local feuds go back to the first year of the war).

As evidence of this failure, the Kabul regime has resorted, through KHAD, to direct terrorism in Peshawar, not only against Afghan, but also Pakistani targets (like the blowing up of the PIA office in Peshawar in January 1986) this kind of activity is very difficult to thwart.

The second target of Kabul's anti-Islamabad propaganda is carried on through the Pakistan political opposition. It is a call to end the support for the Mujahideen and to have direct negotiations between the Pakistani government and the Kabul regime. Here Kabul is playing on the growing unpopularity of the Afghan refugees among the Pakistani population. The opposition is trying to turn this feeling into a political justification for direct talks, by saying that the return of the refugees will be ensured only by the end



Pakistan's cities — future targets for Afghan government sponsored terrorism? Lahore — Photo: J. Gearing

tionally got regular allowances from Kabul whatever the regime might be. The National Democratic Party is the heir of the "Red Shirts" or "God's Servants", who were founded in the thirties by Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The

of the war and the recognizing of the present Kabul regime. The climax of this offensive was reached by the interview of Babrak Karmal by Mushahid Hussain, editor of the leading opposition paper *The Muslim* (12th October 1985 issue). The end of the martial law in December 1985 makes the foreign policy an issue of internal policy in Pakistan. The Government has however succeeded, with its large parliamentary majority, in endorsing its Afghan policy and the opposition seems to be divided and uneasy about what to do towards Afghanistan. If Mushahid Hussain doesn't seem to be worried by the establishment of a communist regime in Afghanistan,

stressing that India and the USA are the main dangers for Pakistan, the general secretary of the PPP, General Tikka Khan, is more reluctant to concede a decisive advantage to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. So beyond the usual rhetoric of any opposition party, we have to make a distinction between the pro-Soviet opponents and a more nationalistic opposition, whose real attitude once eventually in charge might be quite different.

So since the beginning of the war, Islamabad has faced increasing pressure from outside and inside to lessen its support for the Mujahideen, but in fact after the end of martial law, Zia's regime looks stronger than it has ever

been, and more rooted among a population which is more conservative than the vocal intelligentsia. The increase of the pressure on the borders and through the tribes and the opposition is more an admission of a failure to alter Islamabad's policy than a real new step towards a dismantlement of Pakistan, which, incidentally, will not be welcomed by India, who though interested in a weaker Pakistan would not like to see Soviet troops on the Indus. But one can be sure that Kabul will not give up: the next step will probably consist of terrorism in Pakistan's big cities.

## DEVELOPMENT AID TO AFGHANISTAN BEFORE 1978

by Louis Dupree

Afghanistan was never a European colony, and began its own development programmes between the two World Wars. Several Afghan entrepreneurs took advantage of the chaos in Central Asia after World War I, and grew cotton on a large scale. Central Asian cotton had been a major Russian export item in the final years of the Czar, but the *bashmachi* ("bandits" according to the Russians, but "freedom fighters" to themselves) revolts against the Bolsheviks had devastated the Central Asian countryside and cotton production dropped to almost nil. The ecology of Afghan Turkestan was identical to Russian Turkestan, so the Afghan entrepreneurs put thousands of acres of fertile land under cotton cultivation, sold the crops to the Russians, and were paid in gold "Nikolai" coins.

The entrepreneurs also participated in large-scale commercial enterprises and traded with most nations in Asia. With the capital they accumulated, these businessmen introduced small-scale industries into Afghanistan. They purchased entire factories, primarily from Germany and the USSR, and imported foreign technicians to man the plants until their own people could be trained to take over the operations.

The general pattern described above continued until after World War II, in which Afghanistan remained neutral, just as it had in World War I. During the second war, the Afghans could export much of their agricultural produce to the Allied Forces in India and Iran, and thereby accumulate sizeable amounts of US dollars and Pounds Sterling.

Most of these surplus funds were quickly spent by an American engineering company which was engaged in implementing extensive irrigation and land reclamation projects in the Helmand and Arghandab Valleys.

As the Cold War became frostier, the two superpowers, the USA and the USSR, tried to buy friends and influence nations through foreign aid, both grants and loans, and Afghanistan became an "economic Korea," where both sides tested the economic staying power of each other, just as they had done militarily in Korea.

Other nations entered the foreign assistance arena, the more important being West Germany, the People's Republic of China, and the East European satellites of the Soviet Union. The United Nations also sponsored a number of programmes, as did several non-government institutions, such as CARE-MEDICO, NOOR (National Organization of Ophthalmic Rehabilitation), Asia Foundation, etc. (i).

American, West German, British and Scandinavian (mainly Danish) "Peace Corps"-type volunteers also contributed to development, mainly in education and public health. A number of French draftees performed their obligatory military service in Afghanistan, working as veterinarians and with the French archaeological mission, among other specialties.

An interesting development pattern emerged in the 1960s. USA-USSR competition became de facto — if not de jure — cooperation at several levels. In the Ministry of Planning, experts

from the United Nations, the USA, the USSR, West Germany, etc., helped make plans which included each other's grants and loans. (Incidentally, most Soviet aid was in the form of loans; US aid was mainly grants.)

The Soviets constructed a road system leading from north to south; the Americans built one from south to north. The roads had to come together somewhere and cooperation was necessary.

The Americans aerially mapped the southern two-thirds of Afghanistan, and the Soviets, the northern one-third. Over-lapping bench marks had to be planned on the ground, and US-USSR teams worked and travelled together to accomplish this task.

In addition, the construction of the Kabul International Airport required close cooperation because the Soviets constructed the airport facilities and runways, and the Americans installed the communications equipment.

Unfortunately, this "localized detente" did not extend to the international scene.

The 17 July 1973 coup d'état overthrew the Afghan monarchy, established the Republic of Afghanistan (RA), and pushed Mohammad Daoud back into power as prime minister. During Daoud's second tenure (he had been prime minister from 1953 to 1963), Afghanistan's economic situation improved considerably.

American assistance, however, began to drop off, having begun its downward trend in 1970, a process I call "development interruptus."

Afghanistan's favourable balance of payments and amount of foreign reserves jumped phenomenally from 1973-78. A \$2.2 million surplus balance of payment rose to circa \$70 million by 1978, and Afghanistan's convertible foreign exchange (hard currency) increased from \$18 million to \$130 million in the same period. But the Afghan government still depended more on foreign assistance for development resources than on internal revenue. Under the RA's Seven Year Plan (1976-82), internal revenue for development was to total \$1,251.4 million, compared to \$2,533.2 from foreign sources.

A new player had entered the development scene: the Shah of Iran, who promised Afghanistan \$1,141.6 million in grants and loans, including a railroad for railroadless Afghanistan. The rail line would have extended from Kabul to the Iranian border opposite Herat, via Kandahar.

Only a small fraction of the Iranian funds reached Afghanistan before the second coup d'état of 27-28 April 1978 created the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), and precipitated a civil war which resulted ultimately in the Soviet invasion of 24 December 1979.

Even before the 1978 coup, development in Afghanistan suffered from several culturally-oriented constraints, not the least being the lack of qualified administrators, technicians, skilled manpower, and the improper use of those available. Afghan specialists are often bogged down in the mountains of paperwork needed to survive in the day-to-day bureaucratic jungle. The export of labour to Iran and the Persian

Projected amounts from donors to the Seven Year Plan are presented in the chart below:

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE:  
THE SEVEN YEAR PLAN  
(1976-1983)

	(\$ million) Amount Expected
Iran	1,141.6
U.S.S.R	570.5
Kuwait	115.2
IBRD	77.9
Czechoslovakia	70.9
Asian Development Bank	70.5
Saudi Arabi	63.5
West Germany	29.1
United States	22.2
China	20.7
Bulgaria	19.8
United Nations	19.0
France	16.5
Iraq	8.1
India	6.2
Romania	5.0
United Kingdom	4.0
Japan	3.1
Yugoslavia	2.5
Consortiums	131.2
Foreign donors undetermined	135.6
Total	2,533.1

Gulf also complicated the task of finding adequate manpower. This was balanced, however, with the sizeable sums transmitted home by the migrant labourers.

Despite the large amount of foreign assistance and domestic expenditures over the past 30 years or so, Afghanistan remained one of the United Nation's Least Developed Countries (LDGs), determined by comparing three categories: literacy, per capita income, and percentage of industrialization in the economy.

A final word about military assistance is in order. After World War II the Afghan government requested that the USA help modernize the Afghan military. The USA refused for several reasons: its alliance with Pakistan; the belief that the Soviets, exhausted from World War II, would not be able to be of assistance; the underestimation of the strategic importance of Afghanistan, etc.

The Soviets, however, jumped in during the late 1950s, and began to train and arm the Afghan army and air force. Many Afghans, both officers and other ranks, trained by the Soviets are now important commanders in the various *Mujahideen* groups.

The USA, however, maintained a small — but important — military assistance programme until 1979. Afghan officers attended military institutions in the USA, including the various command and staff schools. Some officers received training in *both* the USA and the USSR.

When the Soviets invaded, most in the military went over to the *Mujahideen*. The fighting continues as I write, and development has ceased to exist, another casualty of the war.

(i) see L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton University Press, 1980.



Kabul before 1978 — foreign influence in the form of aid. Photo: J. Gearing

# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS : A LOOK AT THE OFFICIAL SOVIET VERSION OF THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

*Anthony Hyman*

This article will concentrate upon the image of contemporary Afghanistan as presented in the published work of one Soviet writer, Aleksander Prokhanov.

As a novelist and publicist, he has paid frequent visits to Afghanistan since 1980. His novel, *"A Tree in the Centre of Kabul"* (i), was enthusiastically received in 1982 in the columns of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Literary Gazette, a leading Russian journal) in a review which said the book "is reporting from the scene of events. It is fire from the crucible of contemporary life transferred to the pages of a book by a Soviet writer". In a recent essay, *"Notes on Armour"* (ii), Prokhanov described in lyrical vein the Afghan experience and its impact on, "our limited military contingent", the Soviet troops serving in Afghanistan.

"Five years is not a short time. We have come to understand a great deal. We have lived through a great deal, we have learned a great deal. Various illusions have disappeared. We have accumulated knowledge. Not solely military knowledge. That is not what I have in mind. All those who have served in Afghanistan, soldiers and civilians alike, are united in spirit and in character in a special "Afghan brotherhood". Their service or their work in Afghanistan completed, they returned to their homeland and dissolved into cities and villages, into the countless masses and yet they remain a "limited contingent", as it were. They recognise one another at once, through some special indefinable "Afghan" habit, look, gesture, expression. That experience is already part of us . . .

Here, in the Soviet Union, I always look for that brass reflection on people's faces. I find it unerringly. I approach without hesitation. I know that I will be able to listen and talk to my heart's content and that I will be understood."

In his various writings on the Soviet

experience in Afghanistan, Prokhanov presents a highly idealised, romantic — almost, one could say, mystical — version of the drab reality. He consciously and cleverly plays on poignant chords of Russian and Soviet history and culture, exploiting a keen sense of nationalist pride besides extolling in the orthodox way the virtues of Socialist internationalism. In so doing, the present brutal and grim war inside Afghanistan is subtly assimilated into a grander pattern of things; it is the saga of Russian history itself, the seemingly irreversible spread of Soviet power across a large part of the world.

What is especially interesting in this Russian treatment of the Afghan problem is the self-image presented of the Russians serving as soldiers or working in civil capacities in Afghanistan. It echoes faithfully the dreams of adventure and stern duty of Imperialism in the heyday of the Russian and British Empires. At the very end of the nineteenth century, the British poet, Rudyard Kipling, wrote a much-quoted imperialist poem:

"Take up the White Man's burden —  
Send forth the best ye breed —  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need."

In a different idiom but with much the same message does Prokhanov and other Soviet publicists currently enthuse over the "Red Man's Burden", the duties imposed on Soviet Man to bring forward, to "civilise" a backward, undisciplined, independent-minded people like the Afghans. For neo-imperialists from Moscow, the Afghans represent a good specimen of what Kipling wrote were "Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child." (*The White Man's Burden*, 1899).

In Prokhanov's novel, *"A Tree in the Centre of Kabul"*, we find many elements drawn from this curious

blending of patriotic and neo-imperialist sentiments. This novel celebrates the "heroic" and "selfless" work being done in Afghanistan by Soviet citizens, both in army uniform in "limited contingent" and as civilians. The backdrop is exotic, backward Afghanistan, with its small, struggling communist cadres trying to bring progress and peace to a poor land bedevilled by imperialist interference and counter-revolution.

Through the eyes of the novel's main character Volkov, a Soviet journalist reporting from Afghanistan, the reader is meant to understand the "true face" of the Afghan Revolution, i.e., the official Soviet version. Although the novel is simplistic in the extreme in its judgments and characterisation — either heroes or villains — there is some unconscious humour and unexpected ironic touches.

"Some of the PDPA Afghan officials in Kabul are energetic and brave. Of course, they are often lacking in experience, but then there are plenty of Russian 'advisers' to help out." In the novel, a group of Soviet advisers talk together in their Kabul hotel; "they're grand lads in the ministry. They're young, hot-headed. They try, they listen. But they just don't know how to go about it. They don't know how to conduct a meeting . . . They have to have everything explained." And another Soviet adviser joins in the discussion, confidently predicting, "They'll learn. The ABC of Revolution is the same whether in Arabic, in Russian or Pashto".

And in the novel, at least, the young communists do indeed learn quickly. When armed crowds attack the Party Committee office in Kabul, officials show their courage; "there was no trace of panic or even fear, only the desire to act. Their expressions were thoughtful rather than angry, but there was a severity in their manner which suggested that they know their places and their missions quite well".

Much of the action of the novel takes place in the early months after the Soviet invasion in 1980. Prokhanov presents a world where everything is black and white, with no room for disagreement over the correct or honest Soviet policy towards Afghanistan. On the one side, there is a progressive Revolution steadily gathering popular support and on the other is black reaction, destruction and atrocities carried out by mercenaries of Imperialism and counter-Revolution. Always it is from outside Afghanistan that the troublemakers come. "Obviously they're experienced dynamiters", notes the Soviet journalist Volkov at a scene of destruction near Jalalabad. The answer comes quickly from the Party activist Hassan; "They don't need much experience. They're taught how to do it in Pakistan".

"Why do they destroy schools?", innocently asks Volkov, touring an area where guerrillas have recently

attacked. "He thought of how he would write his story . . . The soldier from Siberia flinging himself into the flames to save the tractor. The murdered Afghan driver. Martynov with his blackened face. They were all corn-producers, cultivating the future crop".

Here is the recurring theme of the novel — sacrifice for the future generation together with the heroic "band of brothers", the Russians leading their Afghan junior partners on the path towards Socialism. And on the other side stands black reaction, the wholly destructive element in the Afghan problem, those troublemakers and Muslim fanatics hired by the USA, China and serving the cause of Imperialism.

Like other Soviet publicists, Prokhanov stresses time and again the internationalist aspect of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. It is as workers towards peace and progress in the world, we are told, that these thousands of ordinary Soviet citizens have come to Afghanistan: "They had been gathered from all quarters and sent here to Kabul, to do just the same things — build, cure, train. He had seen these faces in Angola . . . Nigeria . . . Kampuchea . . . He knew their skill and strength tested on the building sites of their own country, their ability to share with others and to give from the heart."

With all this goodwill given from the heart by the Russians, it is surprising, admits Prokhanov, how many ordinary Afghans are against their presence. This paradox is explained away in a superficial way in the novel, on three grounds; (1) most Afghans are too ignorant to understand who their real friends are, (2) many are forced to collaborate with the guerrilla Resistance, and (3) what appear to be mass demonstrations against the Karmal regime are actually nothing but a CIA ruse or pretence by agents.

Those mass demonstrations against the Russians in Kabul and other Afghan cities in 1980 not only did not take place, according to Prokhanov, they were merely a stunt to deceive public opinion. In the novel, an agent of KHAD shows how it was done:

Ali "rewound the cassette, adjusted the level, and the room was filled with a burst of fierce cries: "Allah akbar" as if a crowd of thousands was howling with gaping mouths.

"What is that? Who made the recording? Did someone do it yesterday?"

"It's a repeating tape. Five people yelling could produce such a sound. Cassettes with tapes like this one were found in various regions of the city. Do you remember the shouting last night? The echo from the mountains, the wind, a good set of loudspeakers, and you can produce the impression that people aren't sleeping: they're sitting on the rooftops yelling with all their might".

"What the devil!" Volkov explained . . .

"What a nasty trick! Who could possibly have thought of such a thing?"

"Someone at the CIA most likely", is the answer to that one.

At this level of explanation, this novel is indeed disappointing. The official Soviet version does not admit anything about Afghan matters which cannot be explained away as the fault of ignorance (of Afghans) or of interference (by Imperialists). Nowhere is there even a hint that the biggest problems of Afghanistan have been caused by Soviet interference and mistaken policies.

The explanation of this defect in this book must come from the fact that it is essentially a work of propaganda, not a work of art. Its shallowness and basic lack of honesty is exposed in the false naïveté of many passages, such as the last passage quoted, on the "nasty tricks" of the CIA. Who is the intended public for such a book as, "*A Tree in the Centre of Kabul*"? Certainly, it is meant to popularise official Soviet views on a war which has puzzled, if not worried, sections of the Soviet public. It is clearly also intended for an international public. The English language translation of the novel came out in 1983, in a cheap paperback edition by Progress Publishers of Moscow. Probably few but those already sympathetic to Soviet policy would be convinced by this book, but it has been well received in left-wing circles in India and other countries.

Turning now to Prokhanov's recent essay, "*Notes on Armour*", we note the development of ideas during the intervening years since the writing of the novel in 1980/81. It reveals an ominous trend, elements of which were present earlier. Here is a cult of the Soviet soldier, in live military action for the first time since World War Two. Highly artificial though it is, in its boasts, "*Notes on Armour*" does surely express official views, giving a "seal of approval" for the Soviet-directed war. This is seen as a morally regenerative phenomenon, calling Soviet youth to perform their duty, as their fathers did before them against the fascist armies of Hitler. Instead of listening to "degenerate" western pop singers, the Afghan war, claims Prokhanov, has stimulated patriotic ballads:

"Afghanistan has produced its own way of life . . . Its own heroes. Its own folklore, extensive, naive, affecting, painful, defiant. Songs are now being made which are reminiscent in some ways of ancient soldier and Cossack songs about the homeland, mothers, sweethearts, the evil bullet . . ." The writer claims, "our youth . . . listen gravely to these ballads". With wings of eloquence, he even maintains, "these songs have soared over the mountains of Asia and now resound in our homes."

The most fatuous claim advanced in the essay is probably that of the exemplary state of morale and discipline in Soviet units serving in Afghanistan, and the loving care with which officers and NCOs look after their

conscripted men. All that we know points to the opposite conclusion. Harsh military discipline has caused many desertions from Soviet ranks each year since 1980. Yet Prokhanov writes; "Sonny". That is what the older commanders call their men, and they really are like sons to them because of their age, shared experience, the complex emotion of tenderness, concern and distress, common in times of war, that older officers feel for their men. They cherish them greatly. They do their best to protect them."

We are also informed that Russian soldiers frequently share their bread with the "dehkany" or peasants. They share their rations with impoverished peasants and distribute condensed milk to the children. It is all a pretty picture of friendly relations between Afghan villagers and the Soviet Army units in Afghanistan. But it does not correspond to reality. The millions of Afghan refugees and homeless villagers inside the country would hardly agree with the idyllic image presented by Prokhanov and other Soviet publicists. Death and Destruction, rather than Love and Compassion, is what the Soviet Army, air force and weapons are best known for by the Afghan people. Their experience bears little relation to that carefully presented by Prokhanov.

The careful cultivation of the self-image of the Russians in Afghanistan is clearly an important aspect of the propaganda effort to justify Soviet actions since 1979. For this alone it merits attention. Even if we learn little of the actual situation inside Afghanistan from such material, the Soviet self-image cannot simply, or safely, be ignored. It is now a part of the Afghan jigsaw.

- (i) A TREE IN THE CENTRE OF KABUL, Moscow, 1982
- (ii) NOTES ON ARMOUR, Moscow, 1985



# Brits in Afghanistan: Tim Cooper

In our continuing series, Julian Gearing talks to Tim Cooper about his involvement in television coverage of the war in Afghanistan.

For some aspiring journalists, Afghanistan is a way of making a name for themselves. For Tim Cooper this was his first step into the world of television, following time at sea in the Merchant navy. "Two or three of us, in 1980, decided that Afghanistan was a pretty good place to start, as a lot of people do today. I think that still holds true. We went out and we did some research, including a trip to Paris where we met some representatives of the Mujahideen. It was all just starting and there was virtually no television coverage, so that when we went to CBS and ITN and gave them a rundown on what we planned to do, they gave us some money. CBS gave us more money, at that time, than they have ever given us since. ITN gave us money and cameras. They were obviously very keen to obtain coverage."

"We went out with the barest essentials, with a 16mm camera, hired purportedly for the Lake District, £50 for our stay, and only single tickets, so we had to make sure we sold something in London before we could even get back from Afghanistan. Doing it this way gave us the incentive to succeed."

"We went at the wrong time of year, in December when there was snow everywhere — we failed to research that factor — but were lucky in finding a commander to go in to Kandahar with, and we were lucky in being able to film an ambush. I think ITN used all



Tim Cooper (left) with cameraman Peter Jouvénal in Paktia

our stories in a row. Unfortunately, they were broadcast whilst we were still there, which then led the Russians to announce our names over the radio to say that we were CIA agents."

"Afghanistan was an uncovered story. It was and still is a potentially big story. The reason that it hadn't been covered, as it is today, is that it is very difficult. Staff crews don't want to go in, not that they always demand to have hotels, it is just that there are limits. One of the attractions for us was that we thought it would be an easy war to cover in that it appeared the Russians were the baddies and the Mujahideen were the goodies, so it would be very difficult to make a mess of the story."

To date Tim has made three major trips into Afghanistan, though altogether he has made a total of ten trips

over the border. One of these major trips was to the Panjshir Valley. "We were chased into the Panjshir by the Russians. It was at the time of the ceasefire, in 1983, and we were able to film the Soviet base at Anawa. On our way out we were actually chased out, they had heard of our presence. Trouble was that we couldn't persuade any of the Mujahideen to guide us out, we were stranded, so we had to make our own way out. The only really nasty bit was that I caught hepatitis. So there I was, strapped to the horse, and the horse bolted in a minefield, but as they were only anti-personnel mines it would of only blown the horse's leg off. They had me strapped to the horse because I kept falling off, and of course we had the Soviets chasing us, so it was a bit of a hurry-up and move affair."

Journalists travelling clandestinely



Soviet Mi-8 helicopter near Anawa in the Panjshir valley. Photo: Tim Cooper



inside Afghanistan sometimes get into situations which are dangerous, but on this particular trip, Tim felt they may have been indirectly responsible for the death of some Afghans in a Soviet bombing raid, a raid laid on in an attempt to annihilate journalists thought to be in the target area. "That was rather sad, as a few people were killed as a direct result of us being there. But this is always a possible problem. Certainly there was this problem in Uganda, when I was there the year before last. There were a lot of deaths there, and lot of deaths as a result of us being there. The government try to keep the press out or try to make us guilty in that there should be no press there. The guerrillas wouldn't take us in if they thought they would not get anything out of it."

Tim has been essentially involved in television coverage of Afghanistan though he has had some articles and photographs published. Although now he is mostly involved with documentaries for Channel 4 he had something of a 'freelance apprenticeship' working for the BBC. "It teaches you to come up to certain standards and, certainly when I was working for 'Newsnight', I was mixing with some of the best journalists around. I don't think our Channel 4 documentaries would be as good if we hadn't worked for the BBC."

"All of the best stuff on Afghanistan had been freelance material. And that goes for a lot of similar situations in other parts of the world, small wars that warrant even less press interest.

Unfortunately, nobody wants Afghan stuff at the moment."

Tim stressed that for the media to become interested in Afghanistan they need an interesting story. He doubts whether the TV channels, both in Britain and the US, have spent much more than half a million dollars since the war began. There is much more interest in, for example, Lebanon. "It seems so incredible considering it is the only place where Russians are actually involved. There is so little money being spent on coverage. And it is also extraordinary bearing in mind the sort of encouragement they get from governments to cover it, although in some ways that may almost detract from the story's appeal."

A problem that Tim has found in making trips inside Afghanistan is the general disorganisation and time it takes. "We certainly couldn't do the things we used to do, simply because of the time it takes. We have found other guerrilla groups in other parts of the world are more efficient. It all happens on time, like a well-oiled machine. I have been in with nearly all the different Mujahideen parties and they have all been the same. I have great respect for the Afghans, they are certainly braver than any other guerrilla group I have been with in other parts of the world. They are very good individually but when they get together they are not very good. And they have a lot of weapons when compared to other guerrilla groups in other parts of the world. Not quite on a

par with what the Vietcong had, but they do virtually nothing with it. They have no tradition of organised warfare. Its nothing to do with weapons. Its to do with communications, they don't exploit communications."

"The other factor is morale. I think the Soviet helicopter troops' morale is higher than the Afghans'. Not the ordinary conscripts, as I found out when I did an interview with Soviet prisoners for 'Newsnight' — theirs' was very low. But for the Special Forces, they are on operations for relatively short periods of time. However, for an Afghan who is out in the field for a long time his morale is likely to suffer. This applies only to Soviet forces who are out in the field for a short period."

"Both sides started at an equal level. At first the Soviet forces learnt more slowly than the Afghans. But now it seems that the Soviet's learning curve has just shot up. They are not as stupid as they used to be. They are not trying to use NATO tactics now, they are adapting their tactics to the terrain."

"What the Mujahideen need now is a new strategy in Peshawar, they need to effectively channel money in, especially with these allegations of corruption. It is very difficult to tell the Afghans what to do, but that seems like the very least they could do. With the Alliance in Peshawar one wonders if it is too little, too late. The Resistance is still primarily made up of small groups. I think they had too many weapons, too soon. I don't think they had a chance to grow."



The national sport — Afghan mujahideen play a game of buzkashi in the Panjshir Valley. Photo: Tim Cooper

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# The Afghanistan Support Committee

The Afghanistan Support Committee is an all-party pressure group chaired by The Viscount Cranborne, MP. Our aim is to keep the plight of Afghan people in the forefront of the minds of the British people, and to support the Afghan Resistance to the Soviet invasion.

We do not support any one Resistance group nor do we involve ourselves in any military aid. Our purpose is rather to maximise press and media coverage of the war in Afghanistan; to ensure that the case of the mujahideen is heard and to produce and disseminate information together with our own publicity material.

Whenever possible we use volunteer workers which helps to minimise our small administrative costs. Any surplus is passed on to Afghanaid to relieve suffering inside Afghanistan.

Afghanaid is an independent charity which has a policy of funding relief work inside Afghanistan directly to the victims of the war. Secretariat services are provided for it by the Afghanistan Support Committee, but the two organisations are distinct with separate policy-making committees.

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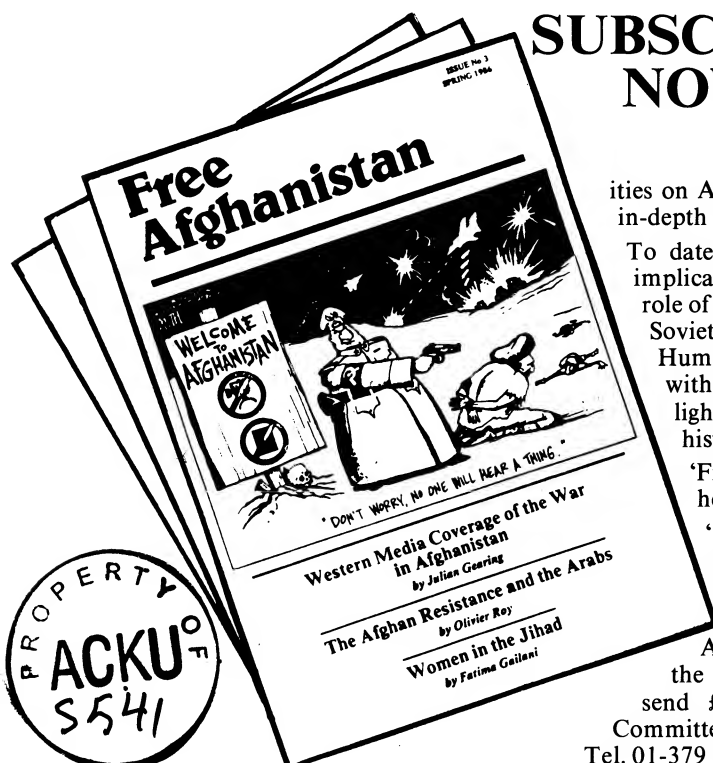
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